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SENSITIVE  
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STATE FOR NEA/PI (KIRBY), DRL/NESCA, AND NEA/MAG

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KMPI](#) [KWMN](#) [MO](#)  
SUBJECT: MOROCCO: WOMEN'S ELECTORAL SUPPORT PROJECT

REF: A. 08 RABAT 1194  
[B](#). 08 RABAT 1196  
[C](#). 08 RABAT 1150  
[D](#). EMBASSY-MEPI EMAILS

[1](#). (SBU) Summary and Action Request: Mission Morocco proposes that the USG (MEPI) urgently provide between USD 500,000 to USD 1 Million to implement a major quick action effort to support a major expansion of women's political participation and enhance democracy. Morocco has recently allocated twelve percent of seats in local councils to women, up from under one percent, at present. Victors would also be eligible for higher office. We understand the U.S. major party institutes, already active on the ground in Morocco, are submitting proposals for this. With the elections slated for June, and nominations due in May, there is very little time to act. Due to their existing projects and connections, NDI and IRI may be the only providers who can make this happen in time. This is a coordinated mission message. End Summary.

[2](#). (U) Embassy has reported the recent decision of the Government of Morocco (GOM) to revise its electoral law to, in effect, allocate some 12 percent of municipal/local council seats in the June 2009 elections for women. This would result in approximately 2,800 new women elected officials, with thousands more politically involved as candidates (ref A). Currently, less than one percent of local council seats are held by women (125 nationwide). USAID's local government project helped prepare the landmark legislation. Of the victors, some likely would be elected by their peers in July to fill regional and provincial councils and some of the one-third of the rotating seats in the Chamber of Councilors, the upper house of parliament. National-level women politicians have told us this is an excellent opportunity to expand both women's role in the political process and reform in general (ref B). While the mechanisms to accomplish this significant expansion of women's participation remains informal, complex, and somewhat vague, the end result could help build the now wanting level of political interest and participation.

[3](#). (U) Action Request: Embassy proposes a significant short-term assistance program to generate women candidates across the party spectrum and among independents and train them to run and win, including in the follow-on elections. Initially, the effort would be based a good deal on civil society organizations, which would beat the grassroots for candidates, help them find parties, and prepare them to run, thus also reducing the likelihood of cronyism. In a second phase, political parties would be assisted to train their own candidates, who also would get general assistance. This would not be a pilot project, but at least an effort to achieve comprehensive, country-wide reach.

14. (SBU) The U.S. major political party institutes, NDI and IRI, both have existing projects with women's political associations (the former funded by USAID and the latter, we understand, by NED). To their credit, the institutes have stepped forward and proposed to fill this urgent need, which they appear uniquely in a position to accomplish. Both have indicated they were submitting proposals to MEPI. IRI was already working to strengthen the nascent Association of Women Local Councilors. NDI has a project with the Women's Action Union (UAF). Embassy has already had initial and positive contacts with these NGO's and we judge them as useful potential vehicles. Both institutes would subsequently work through their existing party connections, particularly for phase 2, and have potentially indicated they could work in separate geographic regions, ultimately covering the whole country. They have proposed to proceed in a coordinated manner. We understand that NDI may propose other activities, of which we judge work with party election poll watchers to be promising. We would otherwise hope they could concentrate on the women.

15. (SBU) While budgeting is not finalized, a project of between USD 500,000 and USD one million would likely be required, divided among implementers. This would provide for concentric circles of train the trainers, in order to reach at least a large majority of the districts and ultimately as many as 10,000 or more potential women candidates, while also reaching out to the public. We will assist in coordination with other donors, which should also be incorporated. This project would complement other efforts we make to support democracy through the local elections. It would also help build, even among the losers. a pool of women civil society activists, better prepared to engage with the political structure.

16. This message has been coordinated with USAID Mission.

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